



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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THE CRITICISM THAT TEACHERS DESIRE.

WE live in an age of criticism from which no institution however reverend, can escape, and from which no office, not even that of a pedagogue can protect us. Time was when by the school boy, with his satchel, going unwillingly to School, the proceedings in which he was obliged to perform a receptive part, incomprehensible and often painful as they might be, were yet accepted with uncomplaining resignation. Did *He* frown? Well, a lowering sky portends a storm, but it is useless to scold at the weather. At a later period we find the old schoolfellows in "Alice" remarking "*He* was a horrid old crab, *he* was"; but still only in a spirit of placid comment. While, as to the institutions themselves, generations have followed generations through our old Grammar Schools as much as a matter of course as through the births, marriages, and deaths column of the local newspaper. "It was good enough for me, and it is good enough for a jackanapes like him" expressed the sentiment of many a father if any fault was suggested, and even this was rare, the general feeling being that to attend a certain school for so many years came as a natural stage in development, and that the exact manner in which the time was spent was a matter of detail, which might be left to the school authorities, the result being pretty much the same in any case. Plant in a small boy aged ten, and the youth of seventeen will come up, whom we can then begin to break in to actual life.

There are a few institutions which retain, even now an odour of such sanctity, social or otherwise, that criticism is attributed, with some show of justice, to envy; institutions which may, with a cheery disregard for sanitation and education and fads in general, double their fees and holidays, sure of their public and of increasing numbers. But these are exceptions in the present day. In the keen competition of subject against subject, ideal with ideal, and new endowments

with old foundations, even the most expensive Schools must mind what they are about. The Eton Latin grammar is no longer the whole duty of master and boy now that the father has realised what good teaching in arithmetic his boy might get at a Board School for nothing; and, when science is taught, sometimes admirably taught, in polytechnics and centre schools, middle-class people begin to ask why it is omitted or worse from the education of their children. Possibly the day may come when the British Parent will have the want of consideration to enquire how it is that a German or Swiss child can be taught to speak and use English at School, while in England the teaching of modern languages too often results only in a confused remembrance of grammatical exceptions, and a distaste for classical authors.

As to the education of girls, that has indeed been transformed out of all knowledge within the last fifty years. The Early Victorian young lady; what *did* she learn and how *did* she manage to be so long in learning it. For I believe she worked much longer hours than the most overpressed school girls of to-day. She rose at 6, and I do not think she went to bed before 9. It is true she left school at the age of 15 or 16, but then she went to School very early and she had two long half years in a year instead of three comparative short terms. So that I may fairly estimate that she had $15 \times 6 = 90$ hours per week; $90 \times 21 = 1890$ hours per half-year; estimating 21 weeks to the half-year; $1890 \times 2 = 3780$ hours per year; $3780 \times 10 = 37,800$ hours of education.

And what did she do in these hours? Not much arithmetic for compound addition is all that is necessary for keeping accounts, and the early Victorian young lady always professed herself quite unable to keep accounts.

Multiplication is vexation,
Division's twice as bad,
The Rule of Three, it puzzles me,
And Practice drives me mad,

was written by her brother as a result of arithmetic at the Grammar School, but I don't think, I speak subject to correction, that the early Victorian young lady got much beyond this. I believe decimals were always supposed to be advanced and mysterious. So we may conclude that her

37,800 hours were not spent chiefly in arithmetic. "The useful and applied branches of the Mathematics" were, of course, out of the question, unless we include here "The use of the Globes." She learnt spelling every day, but I have never understood that she finally learnt to spell with special accuracy. She learnt and forgot Magnall's Questions, and some, not as a rule much, French and Italian, although she was inclined to share her brother's objection to talking French "like a beastly Frenchman." She learnt to write lady's hand and to play "The Battle of Prague," and here the judgment of the future has not justified her. There are those who say that she ruined her constitution by insufficient food, tight-lacing, and thin shoes and stockings. On the other hand, in favourable instances, it is said that she learnt to write good letters, and that she acquired nice manners and a love of literature. Of this last I am rather sceptical in all but specially favourable cases. Parsing the whole of the Excursion, word by word, an early Victorian exercise of which the tradition has come down to me, does not strike me as tending to implant a love for Wordsworth or for literature. I have always wished to acquire the use of the globes, and I hope to do so before I die. Also I admire heartily the friendship-preserving gift of writing good letters, and I acknowledge that nice manners are the chief grace of life. But I believe that 37,800 hours of education, ten years of life, may and should produce these good things, and *more*. At any rate, the early Victorian lady has, on arriving at years of discretion, decided that her gains were not commensurate with her pains, and she has changed all that in the education of her daughter. Her actions have passed a sentence of death on the typical early Victorian school which has almost ceased to exist, though I was surprised and entertained a year or so back to find that a new edition of Magnall's Questions had just appeared, so that somewhere it appears the old order has not changed, and they still somewhere ring the changes on

"What did John then?"

"He swore fearfully at him."

On the whole, however, criticism has done its work during the last generation, and the early Victorian education has been tried and found wanting.

Now I do not suppose that this is due to any very considerable change of ideal. Huxley says that the object of education is so to train and subject the instincts and faculties as to leave the will perfectly free to act in later life. St. Paul had the same idea when he said, "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection." Education always presents itself to me as a constructive process, in which we take the little human beings and, bearing in mind, as Raphael said he did, "a heavenly patterne," we try to add a little here, to take away a little there, and mould all to correspond to our ideal of the perfect human being. Perhaps a truer figure would be that of a growing plant, which we must watch over and supply with all advantages for its growth, and then prune and train, as it grows, to the best symmetry that we know of. The worldly view of education demands that boys shall be prepared to make money and take a good position, and that girls shall be social successes and likely to marry. I do not see how we can quarrel with even this ideal so far as it goes. Put it how one will, I suppose those who have had to bring up children have always aimed at making the best possible men and women out of them according to their ideas. Only in the last generation, opinions have changed immensely as to the best method in which to set about this. The growth of science which has been the great characteristic of the last 50 years, has on the one hand given us a better, though, doubtless, still a very imperfect understanding of the composite nature of a human being, and of his relations to society, and on the other hand the spread of ideas of scientific method has so permeated the least technically scientific of us that we are no longer tolerant of empirical methods. We are driven to believe that education, too, is a science even more fundamentally than it is an art, and we demand at least an attempt at investigation of its laws, and some reasonable justification for the methods adopted.

Education has become a more complicated and many-sided affair than it used to be, and we trust that greater advances are yet to be made on these lines. Now that we are obliged to recognise how immensely the mind depends upon the physical organisation by means of which it works, we have to a considerable extent awakened to the necessity of better

physical education, though, in my opinion, we have not as yet gone nearly far enough in the direction of sound hygiene and careful physical training. The food in schools has improved. I was inwardly amused on being told by a dear and most conscientious old school-mistress how much more difficult it is to make a profit out of a boarding school now than it used to be. "When I first had my school," she said, in a tone of pathetic reminiscence, "no one *expected* anything but bread and butter for breakfast, and *now!*" —

But food is not everything. Baths, fresh air, exercise, wisely arranged physical training; anyone with a really intimate acquaintance, even with our best schools, knows that there is still much to be desired in these respects.

On the intellectual side I think that more advance has been made. Custom is very powerful, but subjects have had to give an account of themselves and of what they are supposed to do. If we retain Latin as a main subject it is not only in accordance with precedent, but because we believe that by a right method of teaching this most logical and exact of languages we give training in clear thinking and precise expression better than in any other way. If we introduce the teaching of science, it is because we believe that we can get thus important training in inductive reasoning combined with valuable education of hand and eye and practical faculty. I *hope* it is because of these considerations. As a teacher of science myself I cannot too strongly protest against that miserable pseudo—scientific teaching, which argues in a circle, dogmatising what it pretends to prove, thus injuring reasoning faculty and destroying all honesty of mind. True science teaching is expensive in time, even more than in material, though somewhat expensive even in material. A Headmistress once said to me, "Really, why should science be so much more bother than mathematics? For mathematics you want a black board, and there you are!" Well, a black board will go so far and no further in teaching science. If we cannot afford more, we must do without science teaching and get what training we can out of other subjects. But let us be honest and either do the thing or not do it.

The ideal is to make each of our children, so far as possible, a perfect human being; in body, healthy, strong and

beautiful; in mind, reasonable, active and responsive, with every faculty the obedient servant of a good will. We must not forget that a human being is necessarily a member of society. The perfect human being must be a perfect member of society. We must therefore give our children their share in the general knowledge of the world and of the society they live in. We must train the social qualities such as forbearance and adaptability, and also the social faculties which will enable them to please and be pleased in later life. Thus though I do not think that every girl ought to learn to play the Battle of Prague, or even the piano at all, much less the violin, unless she has an executive talent that way, I should like to see music more instead of less cultivated, so that it might be much more than at present a matter of social delight. There is no doubt that at one time England was a much more genuinely musical and artistic nation than it is at the present day. There was less piano playing, but much more real knowledge of music, as witness the rich literature of madrigals, ballets, and so forth, which has come down to us from the Elizabethan age, and in which everyone was supposed to take a part at sight. At the beginning of Thomas Morley's "Plain and Easie Introduction to Practical Music," published 1597, there is a passage which is very suggestive. Philomathes says, "Supper being ended, and musicke books, according to the custome, being brought to the table, the mistresse of the house presented me with a part, and earnestly requested me to sing. But when, after many excuses, I protested unfainedly that I could not, everie one began to wonder. Yea, some whispered to others, demanding how I was brought up; so that upon shame of my ignorance I go now to seek out mine old frinde master Gnoramus to make myself his scholler."

I have been sketching out in very partial and hasty outline the ideal we are aiming at, so that the contrast with what we actually attain may be striking. Let us have an ideal; let us dwell upon it and develop it, and then in the light of this let us criticise any actual system of education we please. Public School, Grammar School, Elementary School, High School for Girls, Girls' Boarding School, Home Education. Criticism is easy enough. They all fall short of the ideal, some more in one direction and some more in another.

I could write a paper on the defects of any one of them, and even to-night I have not been able to resist bits of criticism by the way.

Personally, I believe thoroughly in our English Secondary Schools, so unlike, in many important respects, those of any other nation. But I do not deny that they have their faults, and some serious ones. Fifty years ago education was at such a particularly low ebb, and the great movement which began roughly then, and which has since covered England with public schools for girls, and transformed most boys schools, and private schools, was so altogether one of improvement at the time that it aroused great enthusiasm. At the present day it is difficult to realise the importance of the movement, except in listening to some veteran of the struggle. It has been my privilege to be brought into contact with the three greatest pioneers of the movement for the higher education of women, and into intimate connection with the one of them who has just left the field, which having ceased to be that of struggle, remained only one of a labour of love. Miss Buss loved to tell her battles o'er and would, on occasion, entertain the younger generation with racy accounts of the days in which the opening of the Junior Cambridge Examinations to Girls, was regarded as a dangerous experiment. I always felt that such talks were very good for us of later days. Human nature is such that, the struggle once over, its gains are apt to seem a matter of course, and no such grand things after all. And, indeed, I think this is just the stage we have now arrived at. A great experiment has been tried, and has, on the whole, succeeded. The first burst of enthusiasm is over and we are finding out that, even now, things are not perfect. The period of criticism has set in for these new developments, and I, for one, believe that it is right and well that it should. Things are *not* perfect, not by a long way. They need active criticism and determined, energetic, improving.

But, but surely it is not the weary swing, swing of a pendulum that we would copy, beating backwards and forwards till it frets away its energy, and ends by becoming stationary exactly where it started from. Development, not reaction, is what we would be at. There are grown-up people who strike me as being very childish in the way they

look at things, who get into a naughty temper, and want to do away with anything in which they see defects, just as a child flings away a toy of which it is tired. They are not reasonable or practical. A great deal of criticism reaches me from time to time with regard to modern developments in education, and with some of it I so heartily agree that I cannot bear to think that it should be wasted in attempts at reaction, instead of spending itself where I believe it might be very valuable in mending what is defective or wrong. I have been moved to consent to read this paper so that I may put in a plea for the first half of the motto I received from my dear head mistress, Miss Buss.

"Expression of the good: repression of the bad."

I cannot imagine that parents can seriously wish to go back to the education of fifty years ago. Well, then, if we do not wish to go back and sweep away all that has been done, why do we sometimes talk as if we did? Let us instead treat matters in a constructive spirit and determine to go on from where we are, to be very discontented with all that is wrong or imperfect, and equally determined to have things altered for the better.

After all, in the main, and in the long run, education is what the majority of the parents wish it to be, and if things drag on in a rut, it is because the parents do not care for improvement, even in cases where teachers may be anxious for it. I will give an example of what I mean. About two years ago, Dr. Crichton Brown attacked the High Schools on the question of physical training. This question is one on which I feel very strongly, and I deeply regretted the bitter tone he adopted, just because I believed that the criticism was needed and rightly made might do much good. Two summers before, however, the following incident had come to my knowledge:—The head mistress of a High School in a rich and fashionable part of London made arrangements to secure a large field, partly levelled for cricket and tennis, partly open for other games. The teachers took up the matter enthusiastically and volunteered to take turns in being present to superintend during the afternoon and on till sunset. Circulars were sent round to the parents to find out how many would be willing to pay 5s. to cover the necessary expense of hiring the field, &c.

That school numbered over 400, and was giving a first-rate education, preparing for college and high examinations for £12 a-year. Considering that less than 150 parents were willing to pay 5s. so that their children might have games out of doors for the three summer months, I think I am justified in saying that in this case at least, the insufficient physical training in that High School was due to the indifference of the parents.

Then again, with regard to such a point of internal management as ventilation. In a hospital windows stand open always and in all weathers. Doubtless a large number of patients think that this will kill them, but the doctor is an autocrat in his hospital and open the windows remain. Now in schools it is my experience that it is the parents who do not realise that it is the very lowering of vitality caused by bad air which makes a child catch cold, either at the time or afterwards, who fear draughts, and who write little notes and cause the windows to be kept closed. A classroom quite above the average in size and ventilating arrangements, becomes distinctly unpleasant in less than half an hour if it contains thirty people. No one with any sense would leave a child sitting directly under an open window for even half an hour, and yet this would certainly do less harm in the end than constant breathing of bad air. I have known many stuffy class-rooms in my day, but I have never heard of one letter complaining of bad ventilation. Oh! parents, who know something of hygiene, why don't you write little notes too?

I expect the reply to this is that the most enlightened parents approving of a School in the main think they will not interfere, and dislike the appearance of criticism. But there is criticism and criticism, and my point is that wise criticism immensely strengthens the school authorities. Kindly expressions of opinion, politely framed, should offend no one, and if the wise and sympathetic refrain, it simply means that the less enlightened carry it all their own way with trivial complaints.

It is the parents who make the Schools in the long run, but why only in the long run? Will not parents throw aside the "take it or leave it" theory and feel this responsibility to support openly the existing good, and to modify and mend the rest?

It is very interesting to find how the educational problems of to-day are the very same which were presenting themselves three hundred years ago, when many of our great public schools for boys were being started, though it seems sad that so long a period of stagnation and comparative reaction should have intervened, and that we should still be only a very little further on than was Richard Mulcaster, the first head-master of Merchant Taylors' School, and the teacher of Edmund Spencer, who wrote in 1581, "Of all the meanes which pollicie and consideration have devised to further the good training up of children, either to have them well learned or vertuously mannered, I see none comparable to these three points:—

Conference between the persons which have interest in children to have them well brought up.

Certainitie in those things wherein children have to trauell for their good bringing up.

Constancie in performing that which by Conference betweene the persons is set certaine in the things."

Conference, to breede the best.

Certainitie, to plant the best.

Constancie, to continue the best.

Mulcaster recommends what he calls "four coolements" viz.: of neighbours with the parents; of neighbours with the teachers; of parents with teachers; and of teachers with teachers.

Now, whatever we may think of the function of the neighbour in discussing the child with its parents and teachers, as to which, I confess the drawbacks seem to me evident and the benefit only indirect, teachers have long found benefit and strength in conference with other teachers, and the Parents' National Educational Union has invented a fifth complement of parents with other parents. It is, however, Mulcaster's third coolement of parent with teacher which falls in with an idea which I have had in my mind for some time.

"The next conference," he says, "is betweene parents and teachers, whereof, though I have said much, yet can I never say too much, the point is so needfull, because their friendly and faithfull communicating workes perpetual obedience in

the child, contempt of evil, and desire to do well, seeing both they traue to make one good." "I wished the parents so to deal at home as there might be a conformitie between school and home", etc.

I think there really is much in this idea. Is it quite impractical to hope that we may move towards its complete realisation? As a teacher I can quite realise difficulties which might easily arise in the attempt to give parents more intimate connection with the working of a School. For obvious reasons it would not do to have our governing bodies too largely composed of the parents of children actually in the school. Still, I do think parents ought to know a great deal more of the intimate working of schools than many of them do, otherwise they are only able to judge by results, and results are such complicated things. Besides, it is too late to judge when the process is finished, and the child's fate and character so far sealed.

Of course to be of use parents must study education and be able to appreciate the best methods, which are not always the most showy or immediately entertaining. They must know enough themselves to recognise the real expert, and they must be willing to pay, directly or indirectly, for the best of its kind. Low fees, barring endowment, mean overcrowding, an inferior article in the form of an under-paid teacher, and a general skimping of material. Let parents remember that.

I can imagine an already worried teacher exclaiming to me "What, do you want parents always walking about the school, fussing and grumbling and interfering with every detail. Their perpetual little notes are quite bad enough as it is."

Yes, certainly, if only worrying, grumbling, ignorant parents write those little notes. But surely if our schools are worth anything, and if parents have any sympathy with the aims and efforts of the teachers, it would not be chiefly worry and grumbling. The parents are the people who know most and care most about the children, and they ought to know very fully what is happening to them when they send them off for hours a-day during the long years of school life.

But even without this more direct entrance of parents into actual school life there is Mulcaster's suggestion of confer-

ences between teachers and parents. Teachers and parents are aiming at the same thing, and the more they understand one another and work together in a sympathetic and enlightened manner the better it will be for the work, for the children, for the parents, and for the teachers.

The Parents' National Educational Union already does something in this direction. I know that it has frequently asked teachers to address it on various points. I myself have been invited to say my little say to-night. I hope that more may be done in the same direction.